



TEXAS HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

James White

*House District 19
Jasper, Newton, Hardin, Polk, Tyler*

CORRECTIONS
CHAIR

REDISTRICTING

JUDICIARY &
CIVIL JURISPRUDENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Saul Mendoza
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House Unveils Legislation on Mental Health & Wellness - Weekly Legislative Update 3/1/19 -

(Austin, TX) - During the week, the Texas House unveiled legislation pertaining to mental health care and treatment so that we are better able to take care of the most vulnerable in our State. Mental health care and treatment for the most vulnerable citizens in our communities is a critical issue facing our state. While House Bill 10 passed during the 85th Legislative Session to improved insurance access and coverage for mental healthcare, the Legislature has once again made additional improvements to mental health care a top priority for the 86th Session.

More than 200 counties across Texas are without a single child and adolescent psychiatrist. In response to this, legislators are working to expand access to care for patients and create incentives to encourage individuals to enter the mental health field. Lawmakers may consider proposals to address mental health treatment in Texas, including proposals to enhance peer support services, address shortages of psychiatric treatment beds, and expand community treatment options. Other proposals could include establishing a statewide mental health screening program using telemedicine to identify K-12 students with mental health issues and increasing access to licensed professional counselors.

On February 5, 2019, Governor Greg Abbott made mental health care an emergency item during his State of the State remarks to the Legislature. By making this issue an emergency item, the Legislature can pass legislation on the policy issue earlier than other bills.

House Bill 1448 by Rep. John Zerwas establishes the Mental Health Care Consortium. The Texas Mental Health Care Consortium will foster collaboration between Health-Related Institutions (HRIs) on statewide mental health initiatives and create hubs of psychiatry at HRIs to initiate programs authorized by the Legislature. The bill lays out the framework for the creation of the Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN) which facilitates the consultation of on-call mental health professionals with pediatricians on treatment options for youth with behavioral health challenges. HB 1448 also provides parameters for the creation of the Texas Child Health Access through Telemedicine (TCHAT), a program utilizing telemedicine to connect at-risk students with behavioral health assessments and intervention. A grant program for HRI psychology departments to increase psychiatric residency training capacity in community



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settings is also created and the Court of Criminal Appeals is required to develop a training program in consultation with the consortium to educate judges about mental health care resources available in our communities.

HB 10 by Rep. Senfornia Thompson seeks to expand our mental health workforce by adding an additional child and adolescent psychiatrist supplemental grant for Texas' HRIs and other programs participating in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's existing graduate medical education programs. This grant will incentivize the number of residency or fellowship positions in child and adolescent psychiatry. The bill also creates a new Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nurse Grant Program to increase advanced practice nurses specializing in child and adolescent psychiatry.

HB 10 establishes the Child Psychiatric Access Line grant program through the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to provide grants to the HRIs for:

- Peer-to-peer consultation between health care professionals and child and adolescent psychiatrists; and
- Creating programs to support the use of the CPAL by public school personnel who are assisting students with behavioral health concerns.

Lastly, it establishes the Texas Behavioral Health Research Institute. The institute will establish a centralized direction and vision for addressing child and adolescent behavioral health needs and provide grants for researching and treating behavioral health issues. The institute will create an addiction crisis grant program to provide grants to health-related institutions of higher education for:

- Researching, developing, testing, and disseminating new standards for prescribing opioid drugs;
- Teaching the standards for prescribing opioid drugs;
- Developing a workforce that specializes in substance use research and clinical care; and,
- Conducting research related to addiction recovery methods.

Both HB 1448 and HB 10 have been referred to the Public Health Committee and I look forward to supporting them once they are brought up for a vote on the House Floor.

This week I had the opportunity to lay out a few bills before the committees on Human Services, Homeland Security & Public Safety, Public Health, and Transportation.



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- **HB 72:** This legislation addresses the healthcare needs of our foster children who are adopted by Texas families by allowing them to continue receiving STAR Health services. Children in care frequently lose access to the medical providers while in state custody because the Medicaid provider, STAR Health, terminates the child's health coverage on the last day of the month they were adopted, which forces adoptive parents to seek medical and behavioral health care through another insurance provider. This is an unacceptable practice and we must do better.
- **HB 157:** This bill requires that DFPS initiate and maintain a relationship with private adoption agencies that have made or potentially make adoption placement in Texas. Additionally, the legislation would require the agency to provide reports on the placements so that we can insure that these children are in safe and healthy environments.
- **HB 162:** The bill would change state statute so that mandatory or departmental suspensions of a driver's license are only triggered if the original suspension stemmed from a conviction for driving while intoxicated. This will encourage people to go to court to take care of old citations and will help them get back on their feet and driving legally again.
- **HB 410:** This legislation would allow Texans to sell or gift rabbit meat in the amount of less than 500 per year without being overburdened with the state regulation that is currently placed on small and large-scale producers.
- **HB 61:** This bill would allow for escort vehicles that follow trucks with heavily loads to display blue and amber lights when driving on our roads. Currently, they may display flags and only flashing amber lights. This change would allow for better visibility of these vehicles and ensure safety on our roads.

Senator Robert Nichols and I are extremely honored to be carrying the previously mentioned HB 61. We filed this bill in consultation with Allen Fitts from back home. He is a remarkable constituent and I am glad to have had him come up to Austin to testify on this important legislation that would ensure that he and his fellow escort drivers are safe during their commercial drives across the state.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Susan Harrell from Newton and Shannon Holmes, former Hardin-Jefferson superintendent, who came to visit me along with the Association of Texas Professional Educators. I am always eager to talk with fellow educators from Southeast Texas. Ms. Harrell and Dr. Holmes are two remarkable high-energy educators that have been great assets to our communities. Dr. Holmes is currently serving as ATPE Executive Director and I am proud to have him representing our folks back home in his capacity.



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Our hometown sheriffs were also in town this week. Billy Rowles of Newton and Mark Davis of Hardin came by to be recognized on the House Floor along with other sheriffs across the state. Our sheriffs in House District 19 are some of the most hard-working individuals I represent and I am thankful for their efforts in maintaining safe communities.

Nancy Neal with the American Cancer Society also came by to speak with me about their legislative efforts. It is always a pleasure to meet with Nancy whether it is here in Austin or back home in Silsbee, TX.

Lastly, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas held their 2nd annual BBQ lunch on the south lawn of the Texas Capitol. I am incredibly thankful to the event organizers and the tribe for putting on this great event once again. I hear Capitol members and staffers rave about how much they enjoy the tribe's visit during the session. This has truly turned into an outstanding event that will hopefully continue for sessions to come. It is a highlight for me as it seems that everyone from Polk and Tyler counties makes it down here to partake in the celebration. During the visit, I got to chat with Jimmie Cooley and Lonnie Grissom. These two are HD 19 rockstars that I have had the privilege to work with for years since being elected to the Texas House. It is always a pleasure to see them!

The Capitol of Texas belongs to you and visiting the Capitol during the biennial legislative session is a great experience. To assist in arranging your visit please call Saul Mendoza, my Chief of Staff, at (512) 463-0490. Or, you can email him at saul.mendoza@house.texas.gov.

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